

PRESS RELEASE



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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CHARDIN AND THE STILL-LIFE TRADITION IN FRANCE AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART
JUNE 6 THROUGH AUGUST 12

Chardin and the Still-Life Tradition in France, an exhibition produced by The Cleveland Museum of Art's Department of Art History and Education to supplement the major exhibition Chardin 1699-1779 will be on view free at The Cleveland Museum of Art from June 6 through August 12, 1979. Thirty-five works by Chardin's eighteenth century contemporaries, his predecessors, and several prominent nineteenth century still-life painters are compared and contrasted with works by Chardin in an examination of his role in the evolution of still-life painting.

The still lifes of Chardin are generally less crowded and focus on fewer objects than those of his contemporaries--painters like Nicolas de Largilliere (1656-1746), Roland de la Porte (1725-1793), and Jean Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755). These men worked to create elaborately composed illusions painted with invisible brushwork, although Oudry did, like Chardin, simplify his compositions by limiting the number of objects he included. Where many of his contemporaries used dramatic light or perspective to create a trompe l'oeil sense of reality, Chardin would deliberately shun such clever devices which, even when they work, call attention to themselves.

The so-called "new Chardins" of the mid-nineteenth century, such as Philippe Rousseau (1816-1887), François Bonvin (1817-1887), Théodule Ribot (1823-1891), and Antoine Vollon (1833-1900) continued Chardin's practice of simplifying composition and moved the still life ever closer to abstract painting. Like Chardin, they also preferred common household objects, and like him, they avoided the trompe l'oeil and the tendency to moralize through contrived organization and artificial juxtaposition of meaning-laden objects. Instead they let the subject be contemplated for its own sake.

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Chardin's fondness for another sub-category of the still life, the vanitas or allegory, exploring themes of mortality and transience, as in his two works The Monkey as Painter and The Monkey as Antiquarian, was echoed in the nineteenth century by Vollon's The Monkey Cook.

Over the past 15 years, art historian John McCoubrey has focused attention on the emulation of Chardin in the nineteenth century, but the inaccessibility of many of the pictures from that period has made a systematic study of Chardin's influence difficult. The exhibition Chardin and the Still-Life Tradition in France brings a number of those paintings together for the first time. Several key works have been generously lent by Mr. and Mrs. Noah L. Butkin. Others come from the Toledo Museum of Art; the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut; the Louvre, the Carnavalet Museum, and the Petit Palais in Paris; The National Gallery of Canada; and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, as well as The Cleveland Museum of Art.

The exhibition, organized under the direction of Dr. Gabriel P. Weisberg, curator of art history and education at The Cleveland Museum of Art, has been funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. An illustrated 96-page catalogue, containing black and white photographs of every work in the exhibition as well as other relevant paintings and five color plates, has been written by Dr. Weisberg and Dr. William S. Talbot, associate curator of paintings at The Cleveland Museum of Art. The catalogue will be distributed by Indiana University Press as part of the Themes in Art series produced by The Cleveland Museum of Art's Department of Art History and Education.

A gallery talk by Dr. Weisberg will be given on Sunday, July 8 at 1:30 pm.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Relations Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.